



# DEVELOPING AN Alcohol and Drug Policy FOR YOUR WORKPLACE



Western Health Board

Bord Sláinte an Iarthair



**BORD SLÁINTE**  
AN MHLÁN-IARTHAIR

# 1. introduction

THROUGHOUT EUROPE, ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG PROBLEMS IN THE WORKPLACE ARE A MAJOR FACTOR IN ACCIDENTS, ABSENTEEISM AND REDUCED PRODUCTIVITY. THE COST TO EMPLOYERS RUNS INTO MILLIONS EACH YEAR, IN ADDITION TO THE PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL IMPACT ON THE PERSON AND THEIR FAMILY.

IN THE LAST DECADE IRELAND HAD THE HIGHEST INCREASE IN ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AMONG EU COUNTRIES WITH A 41% INCREASE IN PER CAPITA CONSUMPTION (HOPE, 2001). THE 2003 SLAN NATIONAL LIFESTYLE SURVEY FOUND THAT 78% OF ADULTS IN IRELAND DRINK ALCOHOL AND OF THESE 30% OF MALES AND 22% OF FEMALES CONSUME MORE THAN THE RECOMMENDED WEEKLY LIMITS OF SENSIBLE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION.

THE PREVALENCE OF EXPERIMENTAL SUBSTANCE USE HAS ALSO INCREASED OVER THE LAST TWO DECADES WITH THE LEVEL OF SUBSTANCE USE IN GENERAL HIGHER AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN IRELAND THAN IN OTHER COUNTRIES (BRINKLEY ET AL., 1999). DATA PRESENTED IN THE 2002 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN MONITORING CENTRE FOR DRUGS AND DRUG ADDICTION (EMCDDA) ESTIMATE THAT ONE IN FIVE IRISH ADULTS BETWEEN THE AGE OF 18 AND 64 HAVE USED AN ILLEGAL DRUG.

THE RECOGNITION OF THE COST TO INDUSTRY OF ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG RELATED PROBLEMS HAVE GIVEN IMPETUS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SERVICES AIMED AT THE PREVENTION, EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND TREATMENT OF PROBLEMS.

## Why the workplace?

The workplace has been identified as an ideal setting to promote health and well-being through health promotion activities and the implementation of workplace policies. Drug and alcohol issues are of increasing concern for workplaces today.

### For workers...

substance abuse can result in deteriorating health, family and relationship problems, injury, disciplinary action and other work related problems.

### For employers...

substance abuse can lead to safety problems affecting the enterprise, the workforce and the public at large, and it gives rise to increased costs, lower productivity and loss of competitive edge.

Investigations have confirmed that a relatively high level of performance impairment can occur after the consumption of even fairly low quantities of alcohol (Modell & Mountz, 1990) and drugs. These findings support the establishment of broad-based prevention and problem management programmes, rather than concentrating principally on the identification and rehabilitation of heavy drinkers and alcoholics.

The benefits for employers who design and implement an alcohol and drug policy include

- Healthier workforce
- Reduction in absenteeism, sickness, occupational injuries, lost time etc
- Increase in efficiency and productivity
- Improved staff relations and communications
- Improved corporate image and customer relations.

Please refer to the attached reply slip. Your comments are valuable to us and will help us evaluate this programme and plan further workplace initiatives.





## The Legal Position

There are clear reasons for having an alcohol and drug policy from a health and safety perspective. Alcohol or other drug misuse may affect the ability of employers and employees to maintain a safe work environment.

## Health and Safety Legislation

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act (1989) places a duty upon employers

*'to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable the health and safety of employees'.*

Section 9 of the 1989 Act also outlines the duty of employees to co-operate with his employer and

*'to take care of his own safety, health and welfare and that of any other person who may be affected by his acts or omissions while at work'.*

## Drug and Alcohol Legislation

The Road Traffic Act (1961) prohibits the use of mechanical vehicles while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

The Misuse of Drugs Act, 1977 and 1984 outlines the restriction on the possession of controlled drugs. This states that it is illegal to produce, supply or be in possession of drugs covered by the act unless prescribed to the individual by a doctor. The same Act states that it is illegal to have controlled drugs on your premises or to allow your premises to be used for the production, distribution or consumption of controlled drugs.

A workplace alcohol and drug policy can help to ensure that alcohol and substance misuse issues are addressed and that potential accidents are prevented.

**SPECIAL NOTE:**  
It is strongly advised that companies avail of legal advice prior to implementation of the policy.

## Key elements of a policy

- A drug and alcohol policy provides a framework to address drug and alcohol issues in a supportive way while complying with responsibilities in relation to health and safety
- The policy should clearly outline how the company intends to deal with drug and alcohol issues in the workplace
- The wording of the policy is important. It should be clear and easy to understand
- The policy should be communicated in a supportive way, while clearly detailing procedures
- The policy should apply to all employees and staff grades
- The issue of confidentiality should be addressed in the policy
- The policy should be monitored and reviewed at intervals.

## Developing a workplace policy

When designing and drafting such a policy the process is of utmost importance. Wide consultation is essential for the success of any workplace policy and should be conducted with the relevant partners both inside and outside the organisation.

Within the organisation consultation should include;

- Senior managers
- Human resources department
- Occupational health department
- Health and safety advisors
- Employee representatives
- Unions.

Outside the organisation other agencies that can support the process include;

- Local drug and alcohol services
- Health services
- Employer organisations
- Enterprise agencies
- Local community interests
- Gardaí.

## 2. stages of policy development

*The process for drafting the policy should take as long as is necessary to fully consult with all the relevant partners and should consist of the following stages.*



### Stage 1 Set up a working group

- The group should be representative of the workplace and should include management, union and employee representatives.




### Stage 2 What is currently in place?

- Review existing policies and legislation.
- Review current practice.
- Review staff training, support and resources.



### Stage 3 Review your needs

- What are the real needs regarding alcohol and drug use in the workplace?
- You can now establish your priorities, set a timescale and consider the resource implications.



### Stage 4 Draft policy or amend current policy

- Issues to be discussed include education, intervention and training & staff development.
- Review other national and international work done in this area.



### Stage 5 Consultation

- Circulate the draft documents to all those involved and invite feedback.



### Stage 6 Make amendments and produce final policy document

### Stage 7 Dissemination of policy

- How will you communicate the policy throughout your workplace?

### Stage 8 Implementation of policy

- The organisation as a whole needs to become familiar with the policy and begin to use it.

### Stage 9 Monitoring and evaluation

- Organisations should continuously monitor, evaluate and update their policies so that they can continue to be used most effectively.

### Stage 10 Review policy

- Review policy on a timely basis or in the light of different developments.

# 3. alcohol and drug policy

## SAMPLE

The following is an example of a workplace drug and alcohol policy. This is designed as a worksheet to assist the working group in developing a policy to meet the needs of your particular organisation. Questions have been included to create discussion and to highlight areas that will need to be addressed. While this policy relates to drugs and alcohol it is not intended to focus on specific drug-related issues within the workplace. Should your organisation have a particular drug-related concern please contact the services listed on the cover.



*This symbol denotes where you can add to the policy, as a result of discussion and decisions reached by the group.*

## 1 Scope of policy

For the purpose of this policy the term drugs will be defined as all mood-altering substances, either legal or illegal. This includes alcohol, prescribed and other medications, in addition to illegal and illicit substances. This policy does not refer to tobacco use which is dealt with separately.

### Introduction

Alcohol and other drugs affect concentration, co-ordination and performance. It is recognised that the effects of alcohol and other drugs may spill over from ones private life into the workplace resulting in inefficiency, accidents and absenteeism. *(The organisation)* recognises its employees as its most valuable resource and is committed to providing a working environment, which is a healthy and safe one for the entire workforce. Therefore, this policy should be seen in the context of the promotion of health, safety and welfare of all employees of *(The organisation)*.

### Principles

*(The organisation)* recognises the desirability of promoting the health and well being of employees by

- (a) encouraging a healthy lifestyle through preventing the development of alcohol and other drug related problems
- (b) offering assistance to employees who need it to overcome problems caused by alcohol or drug misuse



(c)

### Aims

This policy aims to:

- 1. raise awareness of the risks of alcohol and other drug related problems
- 2. promote the health and wellbeing of employees
- 3. minimise problems at work arising from the effects of alcohol and other drugs
- 4. identify employees with possible alcohol and drug related problems at an early stage
- 5. offer employees with alcohol and other drug related problems referral to an appropriate source for intervention and treatment if necessary



6.

# sample Workplace Alcohol & Drug Policy

## Policy Statement

- This policy applies equally to all staff
- All (the organisation) premises are alcohol and drug free during working hours
- Employees shall be alcohol and drug free while on duty
- After work functions and other social events are outside the remit of this policy.



How many hours prior to working?



How does the organisation regard the use/misuse of prescription drugs?



What about 'Away Days', training courses and other mixed events?

## 2 Intervention

Early recognition of individual alcohol and drug problems is a shared responsibility of all employees, staff and management. It is recognised that this is a complex and difficult issue and that supervisors and managers need training and support to recognise problems and deal with them effectively.

(The organisation) will

(a) provide access to professional services, including training to assist staff in this regard



(b)

## Identifying the Problem

Employees are encouraged to seek assistance on a voluntary basis. However, a problem may become apparent due to the observances of a colleague or manager/supervisor. **NO ONE** characteristic identifies someone with an alcohol and drug related problem but the following **MAY** be indicators especially if occurring in combination or over a period of time.

- |  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| • Absenteeism                              | • Frequent borrowing of money |
| • Accidents and unusual incidents          | • Hand tremor                 |
| • Fluctuating work performance             | • Smelling of Alcohol         |
| • Fluctuations in concentration and energy | • Excessive sweating          |
| • Late returns to work                     | • Unreliability               |
| • Unpredictable mood changes               | • Aggression or irritability  |
| • Poor co-operation with colleagues        | • Confusion or drowsiness     |
| • Unkempt appearance                       |                               |



# sample Workplace Alcohol & Drug Policy

## Procedure

- Observation of behaviour and keeping a note of incidents may lead you to believe that there is a problem. Signs, as those mentioned above, may be evident but do not automatically assume that the problem is drink/drug related but if problems persist, it should be further looked into.
- Where a supervisor/manager identifies a work performance or behaviour indicator of a possible alcohol and drug related problem (see below), he/she should raise this with the staff member and make them aware of the availability of support services (Occupational Health Department, Staff Counselling Welfare Service).
- The manager should only deal with work-related issues and not try to diagnose the personal problem.



Are there any aspects of persons work that are safety critical?



Is a temporary change of job role or function required?

- He/she should keep factual and accurate written records of incidents and interaction with the employee. These records should be stored in a confidential file. The file will be anonymous until or unless suspicion is confirmed.



Who has access to records?



Limits of confidentiality?

- (The organisation) will endeavour to ensure that any employee who seeks help will be treated with discretion and in confidence.
- If work-related problems persist, the staff member may be referred to support services with their agreement. Employees may seek help from other sources if they prefer.



Does the company get back any details of employee's participation in treatment?

- The decision to seek help, agree to referral and/or accept professional intervention will be the responsibility of the individual staff member and refusal to do so will not influence any present or future promotion or disciplinary procedures.
- Employees will be given the same sick leave and the same protection and employment rights as other employees with ill-health problems. Time off will be given for treatment or other specialist help or aftercare provided appropriate certification is submitted.



Hold post open, unpaid leave, for how long?

- Where however, an employees work performance or behaviour remains unsatisfactory despite availability of services, the normal disciplinary procedures will be activated specifically in relation to these issues. The employee will be entitled to representation and due process.



# sample Workplace Alcohol & Drug Policy

## Direct Contact

Any employee who feels they have a problem may approach services such as occupational health or others for support and assistance. Assurances and procedures as set out above shall apply to such contacts.



## Monitoring

Progress of employees will be monitored directly by his/her line manager (if this is source of referral) or by (OHD/Staff Counselling/Welfare) in conjunction with employees line manager by consent of employee only. Should an employee's alcohol and/or other drug related problems reappear, the case should be reconsidered via the above process.

## 3 Alcohol and Drug Awareness

The organisation) will encourage a healthy and sensible approach to alcohol and drugs by providing education/training opportunities to employees:

- to increase awareness of responsible drinking
- to increase knowledge of the risks associated with alcohol and drug misuse
- to increase awareness of early signs of alcohol and drug dependency.

This will be done through:

- A. Specific projects e.g. Alcohol Awareness Week in the workplace
- B. Provision of appropriate information
- C. Modules on induction and other staff development courses



D.

## 4 Co-ordination of Policy

The successful implementation and establishment of this policy is the responsibility of all employees of (the organisation). However, overall co-ordination and responsibility lies with



Supervisors, managers, union reps and personnel department have special responsibilities in relation to the policy. These include:

- Being familiar with the policy and its procedures
- Providing information on the policy and encouraging employees who may have an alcohol and other drug related problem to seek assistance voluntarily.



# sample Workplace Alcohol & Drug Policy

- Assisting the employee and monitoring job performance where he/she remains and/or returns to work
- Having up-to-date information on alcohol and drug advice and treatment agencies
- Ensuring the policy is kept under review and, if necessary, that amendments are proposed.

## Implementation and Review



The policy will come into effect on



and will be subject to review commencing on

## Other opportunities to promote the policy

A. All job descriptions and interviews will include reference to the policy



B.

## References

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For further information in the Western Health Board Region,  
please contact:

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Health Promotion Service (091) 548321/2  
West City Centre, Galway

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Alcoholism Counselling Services (091) 755883  
Merlin Park Hospital, Galway

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Drug Service West City Centre (091) 548324



**MID-WESTERN**  
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This document has been jointly produced by the Health Promotion Departments of the Mid-Western Health Board and the Western Health Board. It is intended that it will be used by organisations in the regions who acknowledge the importance of developing policies and procedures in their workplaces in relation to the growing concern surrounding alcohol and drug issues in society.

## Reply Slip

Company Name:

Address:

Tel:

Fax:

E-mail:

Nature of Business:

Contact Person:

Title:

What are your overall impressions of the guide?

Poor ☐ Fair ☐ Good ☐ Very Good ☐ Excellent ☐

What did you find the most useful part of the guide?

What could have been changed or added to make the guide more useful?

I would be interested in attending training in relation to this initiative and wish to be sent further information regarding this event.

Yes ☐ No ☐

Any Other Comments?

Please detach this reply slip and return to us.